

BOOK REVIEWS



IN CHARGE OF
M. E. CAMERON

THE FRUIT OF THE TREE. By Edith Wharton. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

MRS. WHARTON in her latest book, "The Fruit of the Tree," touches incidentally a point in nursing ethics, thereby adding to her critics a vast contingent from the nursing profession. Discussion has waxed rife over the question of Mrs. Wharton's right to step into professional circles and lay hands on loose material using it, as some have felt, to give, or as giving, an erroneous idea of a nurse's power over the life and death of her patient. Mrs. Wharton is too thoughtful a student to be accused of using material indiscriminately, or of padding her subject to popular shape, and on the other hand, she is not a credulous writer easily convinced of the existence of unusual and miraculous happenings. Nothing happens in her book without its cause—nothing without its effect. When Justine Brent steps into the book on its first page she seems the ideal nurse, but immediately she reveals her weak place. When she tells Amherst that the surgeon has lied in the interest of the millowner, one feels instinctively that she will never bear the curb of professional authority. One realizes that she must accomplish her destiny through a long conflict between a fearless courageous personality, and professional bars which will inevitably crowd back and prevent the development of that personality. Shall she throw up a profession that threatens her liberty? Shall she give herself entirely to that profession, and grow like a trained vine, exactly to the measure of stature that its bonds permit? She follows the latter course—she can hardly be said to have made a choice as she is apparently unconscious of the conflict of her ideals. Years of success follow, in spite of which comes a distaste for duty, a rebellion against the routine, an ever growing desire to escape the monotony of her life. She steps aside from her chosen vocation and attempts to make a place for herself among fresh scenes. Her life is full of usefulness, and for a time she enjoys her enlarged liberty, her lighter and pleasanter labors. She occupies the position of companion-housekeeper-governess to an old school friend. This friend, for whom

she has some remnant of affection, is an individual of singular poverty of character, a creature of such slender and unresisting caliber, that it seems impossible to associate her with any greater disaster than the wreck of her own frail bark and its disappearance forever. Contact with Bessy Amherst brings Justine to a state of mind where she is willing and anxious to go back to the profession she has discarded; and she has just made arrangements to take her place in the hospital again, when fate steps in to prevent her. Bessy is brought home in a dying condition, from which she never recovers though her sufferings are prolonged through weeks,—a fracture of the fourth vertebra, with injury to the cord. There seems to be no hope of anything more than prolonging Bessy's term of misery, at least until some of her relatives can be brought home to share the responsibility which Justine carries entirely alone. Bessy's husband is in South America, her father in Egypt. Alone, day after day, with this suffering creature whose only desire is to escape her misery and who wears her nurses to the limit of endurance by her unavailing protests against her sufferings, Justine is persuaded by her pity and her own inherent loathing of useless suffering to increase Bessy's allowance of morphia and she dies of the overdose. This she does, not in her character of nurse, but as Bessy's only and natural protector; she does it after deliberation and is helped to her decision, by reading certain passages marked by Bessy's husband in a book she had chanced upon—ideas which she allowed to persuade her that he would have joined with her in desiring to make what was left of Bessy's existence painless and comfortable. Justine Brent the nurse, though suffering even as the other nurses on the case were doing, would have held her hand from the act. Justine Brent, the only friend left to fight for Bessy, held herself bound to do as she did. The act never was repented at any time, even in spite of its dire consequences. Justine went her way self acquitted, knowing no feeling of wrong doing or remorse or regret. When she came to conceal the fact from her husband she did so because she feared his capacity for understanding and she hesitated to put him to the test because she knew him too weak to rise to meet it. When, however, it came to buying silence at the price of Wyant's appointment to a place of responsibility, she had no misgiving and her courage and resolution carried the day.

From the standpoint of the humanitarian there is no question of the righteousness of Justine Brent's course—for it must be remembered that we are living in an age unrivalled in history for the development of the humanitarian, the eleemosynary, the emotional and sentimental,—an age in which clubs, societies, corporations, and legislatures, unite in an

effort to bring about conditions whereby the whole of creation may cease from groaning and travailing. From the conservative standpoint of those who, even in this age, believe in the uses of adversity and the function of pain, Justine Brent will be condemned.

For Mrs. Wharton it must be said that in the opinion of the reviewer she had no intention of making the nursing profession, or the medical either, a target for public comment. The situation was bound to provide a test to measure Amherst and Justine. Everything in the book is incidental to that.

THE PHYSICIAN'S VISITING LIST FOR 1907. P. Blakiston's Sons & Co., 1012 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa. Price, \$1.00.

THE Physician's Visiting List including diary, calendar, account book, etc., makes its annual appearance in the well known neat, compact and convenient form so long familiar to the profession. As usual it contains information on various subjects of interest to the practitioner, likely to be of use in times of emergency. The title page announces the present year to be the fifty-seventh year of publication for this useful little book.

FIVE HUNDRED SURGICAL SUGGESTIONS. *Practical Brevities in Surgical Diagnosis and Treatment.* By Walter M. Brickner, B.S., M.D., Chief of Surgical Department, Mount Sinai Hospital Dispensary, New York; Editor-in-Chief, American Journal of Surgery; and Eli Moschcowitz, A.B., M.D., Assistant Physician Mount Sinai Dispensary, New York; Associate Editor American Journal of Surgery. *Second Series.* Duodecimo; 125 pages. New York: Surgery Publishing Company, 92 William Street, 1907. Price, \$1.00.

THE first series of this book, it will be remembered, was reviewed in these pages a year ago. The present volume includes the matter of the first series to which has been added an equal amount of new material thus making the book a second series rather than a second edition. To all who remember the first volume, the present work needs no better recommendation than the announcement that here is more of the same kind. Like its predecessor the present volume makes a very smart appearance in scarlet and gold binding making a pleasing diversion among the sombre tints usually adopted by scientific writers.